

**UNIVERSITY OF  
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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES**

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTERS  
CRAKE AND JIMMY/SNOWMAN  
IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S DYSTOPIAN NOVEL  
*ORYX AND CRAKE***

**BA thesis**

**JOOSEP JUSSI  
SUPERVISOR: *Asst. Lect.* EVA REIN**

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## ABSTRACT

Margaret Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake* is the first book of a dystopian *MaddAddam* trilogy and it has been discussed by many scholars in various scientific fields. An important issue for Atwood that manifests in the novel and is also explored in the thesis is the environment. The main focus of the thesis is on the novel's two fascinating characters that Atwood has created.

There are two main questions that this thesis specifically seeks to answer. The first one is the reasons that the antagonist Crake had for ending civilization and creating genetically engineered humanoids to populate the earth after the destruction of mankind. The second one is concerned with the protagonist Jimmy, who renames himself Snowman after the apocalyptic event, and his reasons to keep living in the post-apocalyptic world, in which he believes to be the only human left, as well as his decision to act as a teacher and a guide to the "Crakers," the beings Crake left behind.

The thesis consists of an introduction, two chapters and a conclusion. The introduction provides a short overview of the novel and the main themes of Atwood's works.

The first chapter is a literature review. It discusses six aspects of the novel that have received the most critical attention: the environment, social class and sustainability, the two main characters Crake and Jimmy/Snowman, an allegory to William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, as well as the much debated genre question of the novel.

The empirical part analyses the development of the antagonist Crake and the protagonist Jimmy/Snowman from their childhood to adulthood and delves into the reasons for their decisions.

The conclusion summarises the findings of the thesis.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the modern times different people have contrasting views on how to improve the world. In general, the contemporary society values STEM subjects – science, technology, engineering and mathematics more than the humanities. However, every individual still needs to find their rightful place in the community. The Canadian author Margaret Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake* not only shows a possible scenario of favouring STEM at the expense of the humanities, but the antagonist and the protagonist also achieve their path differently.

Human behaviour, the environment and new beginnings are some of the most recurrent themes in Atwood's works. This also applies to *Oryx and Crake*, published in 2003. The novel was followed by two more books, *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam* in 2009 and 2013 respectively. While the former deals with characters parallel to those in *Oryx and Crake*, the latter serves as a sequel to both novels. The series is now known as the *MaddAddam* trilogy, focusing on a small group of survivors of the apocalypse.

Although *Oryx and Crake* is set in near future, like Atwood's first dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, published in 1985, she herself considers it not a science fiction, but a "speculative fiction" (Atwood 2004: 513) with "obvious dystopian elements" (2004: 517). Furthermore, in a 2004 interview to Ira Flatow she has said that everything in the novel from odd science experiments and genetic splicing to impending natural disasters have already happened or are very close to happening in real life (Science Friday N.d.: para. 8).

*Oryx and Crake* deals with the aftermath of an apocalyptic event which has left the world desolate. The human race has been struck by a mysterious disease and the landscape has been taken over by exotic animal splices such as "pigoons" and "rakunks." The narrative is not linear but alternates between the present and the past. The reader finds out

from flashbacks how the end of civilization happened. In the narrative present the reader is introduced to the protagonist Snowman and the “Crakers,” genetically modified humans created by his former best friend, Crake. Snowman was formerly Jimmy and throughout the novel the reader learns from his perspective how Crake was the architect of the apocalypse.

This thesis will explicate the reasons why Crake orchestrated the end of civilization and also the reasons that Snowman has for living and taking care of the “Crakers” in the post-apocalyptic world. To answer these questions, the literature review based on the reception of *Oryx and Crake* will provide a background to the analysis of the novels’ two characters. This includes the discussion of critics’ views of the main themes and characters of the novel as well as an interesting allegory to William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and the genre question of the novel. The empirical part will explore the development of Crake and Jimmy/Snowman, their troubled childhoods and difficult family lives, their teenage and young adult lives as well as their relationship.

# 1 THE SUBJECTS OF DEBATE IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *ORYX AND CRAKE*: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 1.1 Introduction

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* has attracted much scholarly attention. The novel has been a topic of discussion not only in literary but also environmental studies and other fields of science. The literature review will look at six aspects of the novel discussed in the critical articles: the environment, social class and sustainability, the antagonist Crake, the protagonist Jimmy, an allegory to William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and the genre question. While the reception of *Oryx and Crake* covers a wide range of topics and debates, the ones discussed in the following subchapters have been chosen to provide a background to the analysis of the novel's two main characters.

The literature review begins with the main points about the environmental issues in the novel. The literary criticism deals with the problem that the scientists in the novel, like the antagonist Crake, take matters into their own hands regarding scientific experiments. The next subchapter will discuss the social world of the novel. Many scholars have contrasted the "Pleeblands," which are the real world equivalent of slums and the "Compounds," which represent guarded, privileged neighbourhoods that appear in the novel. In relation to the compounds and pleeblands, the issue of sustainability is often raised. The novel's two main characters, the protagonist Jimmy, who later renames himself Snowman after the apocalyptic event and the antagonist Crake, whose development and relations are the focus of this thesis, have inspired different opinions and debates. In order to find out the motivations of these characters, which is the aim of the thesis, it is necessary to examine previous studies on the topic. Apart from the themes and characters of *Oryx and Crake*, critics have been also interested in the intertextuality of the novel. For the purposes of this thesis, the allegory to *Hamlet* is especially relevant.

The genre question of the novel is probably the most debated one. Even the writer herself has stated her opinion, that the novel does not belong to the genre of science fiction but speculative fiction, especially as Atwood has claimed about the novel that it “invents nothing we haven’t already invented or started to invent” (quoted in Bouson 2004: 140). Terms such as science-fiction and dystopian have been used as well. Some critics have also claimed it to be a post-apocalyptic novel. This perspective is further discussed to rely on it in the analysis of the main characters of the novel in the empirical part of the thesis.

## 1.2 The Environment

An aspect discussed in several critical articles is the environment. A critical article that talks about this issue is Jayne Glover’s “Human/Nature: Ecological philosophy in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*.” In the article the author mentions about the book that “It is becoming ever more obvious that many human practices are not sustainable: ultimately human beings need more food and space, viable soils, clean air and potable water than the earth can currently provide” (Glover 2009: 52). The author goes on to say how all of that in accordance with human wastefulness is the reason for global warming and the suffering of Earth in general. The environmental aspect of the book is one of the most captivating in the entire novel. Atwood has repeatedly discussed the environment in many interviews and also in several of her other books. The critical article also mentions this when Glover states that “Rather than merely describing such a world, Atwood uses the apocalyptic setting of the novel to engage with the potential social, political, economic and moral consequences of the Earth’s changed environment” (Glover 2009: 52). This book was written by Atwood in 2003 and already then she noticed how volatile the environment can be and now it is 2018 and in recent years there has been an upswing in natural disasters all around the

globe which have parallels to some of the natural forces in the book.

Furthermore, Glover goes on to state how in the novel there are huge corporations who use science and the knowledge they have gained to control diseases and create new genetically modified foods and other unnatural chemical products (Glover 2009: 52). This segues into one of the most intriguing topics in the book – the genetically engineered animals who are repeatedly mentioned throughout the novel. The “pigoon” as it is called in the book is a “transgenic pig host able to grow human-tissue organs, such as kidneys, that would be continuously available to harvest for transplant purposes” (Glover 2009: 52). As was previously stated this is a speculative fiction book and the “pigoon” is based on research that Atwood herself has done into the topic of real world genetic engineering. Nevertheless, there are other genetically engineered animals such as the “rakunk” which is a splice of racoon and a skunk and a “wolvog” which combines wolves and dogs. This is scientists playing God and this is an aspect that this thesis will explore. Glover also states that the scientists in the book do not create these animals just because they need them for transplant purposes and human advancement, but rather “They do this simply because they can, not for any necessary or constructive scientific reason” (Glover 2009: 53). The antagonist of the novel, Crake, goes on to do this exact thing – play God, ignoring all ethical boundaries because he has the assumption that he has the right to control the natural world (Glover 2009: 53).

Glover ends the discussion of the ecological matters her article by stating that Crake “Appears to be the representative, in this, of the kind of scientist whose overconfidence in the positives of science and technology has led to a fatal disregard for ethics” (Glover 2009: 53). This is one of the most crucial themes of the novel and interesting parallels to the real world can be drawn. In the book scientists like Crake ignore all ethics either for profit or scientific advancement. They are based on experts in



the real world who do things just because they can and they never stop to think whether it is something they should do.

### 1.3 Social class and sustainability

Another aspect that is discussed in the critical articles is the issue of social class. It manifests itself in the “Pleeblands,” to which the real world equivalent are the slums and in the “Compounds,” which are protected, guarded upper middle class neighbourhoods. Glover’s article also deals with this issue and the author states that “In *Oryx and Crake*, scientists have become placed in a position of privilege, insulated from the realities of normal life” (Glover 2009: 53). She further adds that the Watson-Crick campus, which is the university Crake attends, is seemingly an idyllic place to live. It is “safe, clean, unpolluted and organically diverse. In contrast to the areas inhabited by those not part of the scientific elite, the pleeblands, seem dystopian and they are filled with disease, polluted with factory smoke and garbage, beset by violent crime and prostitution, with people living in high-rise buildings with nothing to do” (Glover 2009: 53). However, throughout the course of the novel it is revealed to the readers that the compounds are not a perfect place to live, because it is completely controlled and it even becomes a sort of prison for the protagonist’s mother who escapes to live free in the pleeblands (Glover 2009: 54). The reader can distinguish between the two areas in the novel, however, it is up for interpretation whether the pleeblands are the questionable areas or are the controlled and contained compounds the reasons for both Jimmy’s and Crake’s horrible family lives.

An article by Hannes Bergthaller called “Housebreaking the Human Animal: Humanism and the Problem of Sustainability in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*” focuses on sustainability in the novel that is contrasted with the real world. Bergthaller states:

We no longer just want to preserve certain natural habitats or reduce the quantity of particular

harmful substances in the environment, we want to achieve these goals while at the same time allowing for further technological, economic and social progress on a global scale. We want to alleviate poverty and foster individual liberty in what used to be called the Third World while holding on to the good life we have created for ourselves in the First, at the same time preserve the integrity of the natural world for future generations. (Bergthaller 2010: 730)

The author then goes on to mention that “when we say sustainability, what we mean is simply that we want to have our cake and eat it, too” (Bergthaller 2010: 730). This is a concept in Atwood’s novel that the reader can use to draw parallels to the real world. Thinking about this notion it can be thought that to the Western world, the pleeblands seem to represent the “other” what historically is thought of as the Third World. These are the places that are filled with diseases, polluted with garbage and infested with violent crime, while the compounds are an allegory to the more advanced West. The sustainability issue that is addressed in Bergthaller’s article is a somewhat sombre thought in the context of the novel. In the world infested with natural disasters and pollution on a grand scale, it is evident that what matters most even then is still the pursuit of wealth. Parallels to the real world can easily be drawn from this. “Sustainability” of Earth is largely ignored, the human race consumes everything the planet has to offer at a substantial rate, people always strive for more and they think largely of here and now and ignore any negative future implications.

#### **1.4 The antagonist Crake**

A much discussed aspect in several critical articles is the antagonist of the novel, Crake – the architect of destruction, the man who in the book ends civilization. He created the “BlyssPluss” pill, a product which was marketed as a “one-time-does-it-all- birth-control pill” which also increases libido and prolongs youth (Glover 2009: 55). However, the pill had a nasty side effect which “led to high fever, bleeding from the eyes and skin, convulsions, then breakdown of the inner organs, followed by death” (Glover 2009: 56). Through this act of bioterrorism Crake managed to massacre almost all of humanity. This

thesis will seek to answer the reasons that Crake had for committing such an act.

In the book Atwood reveals that Crake saw overpopulation as the most important problem and so he created his genetically engineered creations, “Crakers.” He specifically designed them without features like “emotion, love, imagination or creativity” (Glover 2009: 57). Crake also rejected “culture” as it manifested in “idols, funerals, kings and slavery” which is seen as an intrinsic part of human nature” (Glover 2009: 57). To try and understand why Crake engineered this genocide the reader needs to go back to Crake’s childhood.

However, perhaps the most important aspect of Crake’s character is the time he spent at school and university. It was there, during the time of his adolescence where Crake started his master plan to destroy humanity and remake it in his image. Bouson mentions in her article that Crake does not believe in God nor Nature and “also does not believe in the value of human life” (2004: 146). That is clear to the reader as the novel progresses and from the conversations Crake has with Jimmy. It also manifests in the fact that Crake only has one real friend, Jimmy. Another theme evident in the book is the distinction between “numbers” and “words” people. Unlike Jimmy, Crake is most definitely a numbers person and after his high school experience is over, he is accepted into the prestigious Watson-Crick Institute, a top university where Crake continues his education. Watson-Crick, as described in the article by Bouson (2004), is populated with students with various kinds of the autism spectrum disorder. Eventually it is there where he creates the virus that destroys the world.

Numerous debates can be had to pinpoint the exact moment when Crake decided to end humanity. It could have been in his early childhood when his father was killed and where his eyes were opened and the hatred towards the world started to fester. Those problems could have been accelerated when, during his high school years when he

played violent games and looked at child pornography with Jimmy. However, his plans could have started to take shape when he was at university with like-minded brilliant individuals. Furthermore, it could have also been Oryx, an Asian woman in one of the pornography videos they watch who later becomes Crake's assistant and lover, who then later also becomes Jimmy's lover because Jimmy had been madly infatuated with her ever since the first time he saw her. In Stephen Dunning's article titled "Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*: The Terror of the Therapeutic" it is said that jealousy and revenge could have been his motives (Dunning 2005: 96). In the end, there is not a definitive answer to the exact reason of Crake's madness.

### **1.5 The protagonist Jimmy**

The protagonist Jimmy, who renames himself Snowman after the extinction event, has received as much critical attention as the character Crake. His relationship with Crake, the world in general and the reasons for continuing to take care of Crake's creation are all examined. As mentioned above, in this book the theme of numbers and words people is evident. Jimmy was certainly the latter. As argued in Dunning's article, "'Word' people, like Jimmy, however, can succeed only by proving themselves profitable in some manner, usually by helping to produce psychologically manipulative (and misleading) advertising" (Dunning 2005: 90).

Jimmy grew up in the Compounds amongst people who were not necessarily more intelligent than him, but were far smarter in the areas that mattered to the world. Just like Crake, Snowman had a difficult family life with his mother running away and even taking Jimmy's pet rakunk with her. In Dunning's article the author mentions how his pet rakunk, named Killer had "Provided his only comfort" (Dunning 2005: 97). In addition, Shuli Barzilai in her article "Tell My Story": Remembrance and Revenge in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*" states that "She does not love him

enough to put him before her own needs and desires She abandons Jimmy for a cause (rather than a man) that she ardently embraces” (Barzilai 2008: 96). There can be many different theories written about the relationship between Jimmy and his mother, but it can be thought that Jimmy, because of his empathy did not actually hold on no ill will towards his mother for long.

Furthermore, just like Crake, Jimmy also did not have many friends to speak of. His high school years dealt with the harsh reality that Crake was his only real companion. Dunning’s article states that “Jimmy’s and Crake’s relationship, which remains the closest thing to a recognizable friendship that we find in the novel” (Dunning 2005: 91). His relationship with Crake was certainly one of the more intriguing aspects of the novel because it was he who killed him, because Crake, in addition to ending the world, also killed Oryx, the woman Jimmy loved, in front on him.

In addition, the critical articles talk about Snowman’s decision to take care of the Crakers even after the world had ended. Jimmy did half-heartedly promise Oryx to take care of the Crakers should anything bad ever happen to her. Maybe it was that promise or perhaps Crake did indeed have some sort of mysterious power over Jimmy even after his death. Glover suggests that when she states: “Crake was against the notion of God, or of gods of any kind, and would surely be disgusted by the spectacle of his own gradual deification” (Glover 2009: 58). It is so because the Crakers had become more curious as they grew older and Snowman had created this mystery around both Oryx and Crake, suggesting that they are these mythical beings who will one day return to the Crakers.

## **1.6 An allegory to Hamlet**

Atwood often uses allegory in her novels and this subchapter will explore Shuli Barzilai’s critical article which shows how intertextuality is present in Atwood’s book. Barzilai proposes that “*Oryx and Crake* be read as the site of a dynamic intertextual

dialogue with one particular tragedy and tragic hero” (Barzilai 2008: 89). In this context, Snowman is compared to Horatio and Barzilai argues that “Snowman, like Horatio, is condemned to carry on a while longer and to explain, albeit only to himself, how this scene of desolation came about” (Barzilai 2008: 89). While this may not be obvious on the first reading, then reading the novel for a second or a third time, the parallels become visible.

Crake, being Hamlet, whose father is murdered and mother quickly remarries to another man who he even calls “Uncle Pete.” All those events that happen to Crake in his childhood then set him out for revenge against the world albeit at a much grander scale than Hamlet in his story. The author goes on to mention Gertrude and how she has two analogues in the novel to both Crake’s mother and Jimmy’s mother. Crake’s mother who learns of his husband’s assassination and does nothing to prevent that but perhaps more interestingly of Jimmy’s mother who like Gertrude “Transfers her allegiance from one husband to another, Jimmy’s mother makes a life choice that orients her son in a mortal direction for which she may be deemed indirectly, albeit unforeseeably, responsible” (Barzilai 2008: 96).

In addition, Barzilai claims that when Snowman later thinks about Crake, he thinks back to his earlier life when he remembered how “Every moment [Snowman’s] lived in the past few months was dreamed first by Crake. No wonder Crake screamed so much” (Barzilai 2008: 98). Furthermore, she points out how Snowman, in addition to being the Horatio of this story, he is also “A double, a twinned brother, who finally recognizes the indivisibility of their fates” (Barzilai 2008:98). With Barzilai’s discussion of the novel, the parallels between the *Hamlet* and *Oryx and Crake* become detectable for the reader.

## **1.7 The genre question**

Another aspect of this novel that has been subject to discussion is the genre question, whether it is a dystopian or a post-apocalyptic novel. As mentioned above,

Margaret Atwood has called *Oryx and Crake* “speculative fiction” in many interviews that she has given. A critical article by Mark Bosco titled “The Apocalyptic Imagination in *Oryx and Crake*” offers an interesting view on the subject. The author states that “*Oryx and Crake* is one of Atwood’s most apocalyptic novels” (Bosco 2010: 157). The author adds that: “When read against the Western development of apocalyptic literature Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* both represents and transcends the genre” (Bosco 2010: 157). Moreover, he argues that “*Oryx and Crake* falls into the general category, then, of a dystopian novel, mixing multiple genres but ultimately presenting a world that has been shaped by the revolutionary technological developments of the last decades (Bosco 2010: 161).

However, the author later also claims that “Atwood introduces the reader to eschatological time from the novel’s first page (Bosco 2010: 162). The article ends with the author stating how

Atwood is intent on warning us about continuing on the ‘road that we’re already on’ in our contemporary consumer and corporate culture, where scientists are playing God with the ‘building blocks of life’ and where material strategies for fulfilment prevail, whether from the market value placed on human life or the unfettered presumptions of scientific progress. (Bosco 2010: 171)

Furthermore, the author ends the article with the suggestion that “In *Oryx and Crake*, Margaret Atwood offers a sober ending to our present human folly, but proposes a possible new beginning for her readers, here, now, and on the horizon” (Bosco 2010: 171). Overall, there is no singular answer to the genre question. It can be said that Bosco is correct and the novel is a dystopian novel mixed with some post-apocalyptic components.

## 1.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, as stated earlier, this book is one that has been discussed in various literary and scientific fields, because there is a lot of material in the novel that raises important issues for all of them. However, the environmental and societal aspects of this novel are definitely some of the ones that deserve a closer look. Parallels can be easily drawn to some of the larger problems that are facing the real world today. In addition,

there are these brilliant characters that Atwood has concocted and they also deserve recognition. The *Hamlet* allegory is also an exciting aspect to explore because there are so many parallels that one can find. In addition, the genre of the novel is a fiercely debated topic. It is exactly these aspects of the novel's reception that will be further analysed in the empirical part of the thesis.



## **2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRAKE AND JIMMY/SNOWMAN: EMPIRICAL PART**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

There are two research questions that this thesis will answer. The first one is concerned with Crake's reasoning – what caused his madness and what was it that made him end civilization? The second one is why Jimmy, who had renamed himself Snowman after the apocalypse, continues to live and carries on Crake's legacy? Why does he persevere and keep living even though he thinks that he is the only authentic human left alongside Crake's genetically engineered creatures. The thesis statements are that Crake's difficult family life, especially the tragedy regarding his father, his limited ability to make real human connections other than Jimmy and the anger he had towards the world coupled with his God complex were his main reasons for engineering the apocalypse. Jimmy's decision to continue living in the post-apocalyptic world is the promises he made to Oryx, a woman the two men both loved. The difficult relationship with his parents and him not wanting to make the same mistakes is another reason. The last reason is the love he had for Crake that made Jimmy, now renamed Snowman, continue Crake's legacy. The empirical part, with the support of articles from the literature review, try to convey how the environment in the compounds helped develop Crake's plan.

### **2.2 Crake**

#### **2.2.1 Adolescence**

"Your friend is intellectually honourable" (Atwood 2013: 79). That is how Jimmy's mother described Crake to Jimmy only after a short time into their friendship. In fact, Crake was exactly like that to the unsuspecting outside world. Later on when Snowman thought back to Crake, he arrived at the same conclusion. He thought back to how he was not popular but people did feel flattered by his regard. When he had conversations with

people, Crake looked at them like he was listening and it was the most important thing in the world even though it would not always show. Everyone could see that he radiated potential, but no one knew for what (Atwood 2013: 86).

Crake was an extremely smart student and in the story he was definitely a “numbers” person. The “numbers” versus “words” people is a theme that often reoccurs in the novel. It is so because both of the boys lived in the “Compounds,” the highly guarded, wealthy places to live which in the book were the opposite of “pleeblands,” the crime-infested neighbourhoods which are the real world equivalent of slums. Crake is exceptionally talented in all classes that matter to the world. Mathematics, chemistry, physics are the subjects in which he thrives. However, throughout the novel it is clear to the reader that even though he is immensely intelligent, he cannot form real friendships other than Jimmy. Furthermore, this is shown to the reader by the following quotes “Girls had found him intimidating” (Atwood 2013: 226) and “Falling in love /.../ was a hormonally induced delusional state” (Atwood 2013: 227). Crake did in fact have sexual relations with women but he never made a grand spectacle of it because it was not important to him. It can be thought that he liked control and wanted every interaction to follow his terms.

The friendship between Crake and Jimmy, however, is portrayed by Atwood as a sort of companionship that again follows Crake’s terms. The two friends sit together and do not play sports but rather play video games and mostly games that Crake likes to play like chess, which Crake is exceptionally good at. Moreover, they also had a couple other extracurricular activities that they did together. “They’d roll a few joints a few joints and smoke them while watching the executions and the porn” and usually it ended with Crake “who’d decide what to watch and when to stop watching it” (Atwood 2013: 99). From this it is evident to the reader that even in his only friendship with Jimmy it is he who decides

how everything is. He is the one who always wants to be in control and have everything done on his terms. A snippet of foreshadowing that Atwood provides to the reader about Crake is when Jimmy asks Crake for help with his schoolwork and when Jimmy asks “Why help me out,” Crake replies “Because I’m a sadist” (Atwood 2013: 204). This is an interesting line to ponder about because out of the two boys it was Jimmy who was the one with a sense of humour and Crake had, at best, extremely dry humour.

The assumption can be made that by this point Crake had already concocted his apocalypse plan. His difficult family life is also briefly talked about with his mother remarrying “Uncle Pete,” a man that Crake dislikes, shown by the fact that Crake hacked into Uncle Pete’s special account for the illegal sites that the two boys could not access because they were under-age (Atwood, 2013:98). The summer after high school graduation Crake has a talk with Jimmy about his father’s “suicide” because at the time everyone around the compound and Crake told him that. Jimmy had asked him “You think he maybe fell off” (Atwood 2013: 215). Crake answered that “He was kind of uncoordinated” and added “He didn’t always watch where he was going. He believed in contributing to the improvement of the human lot” (Atwood 2013: 215). The latter quote is an extremely thought-provoking one. It can be concluded from this quote that even the apocalypse plan was rattling around in his head, because the Crakers, his genetically engineered humanoids were Crake’s own thought about improving the human lot. Later Atwood heavily implies that Crake’s biological father was killed because he intended to be a whistle-blower and so he was assassinated before any of that could happen and Crake was certainly aware of this.

### **2.2.2 University years**

Crake and Jimmy had different paths after high school graduation. Crake was recruited to the prestigious “Watson-Crick Institute” which was “like going to Harvard had been, back before it got drowned” (Atwood 2013: 203). Jimmy, however, went to a less

distinguished school called the “Martha Graham Academy.” The boys kept in touch by occasionally talking and playing chess over the computer. In his university Crake was surrounded by like-minded geniuses. “Watson-Crick was known to the students there as Asperger’s U. Because of the high percentage of brilliant weirdos” (Atwood 2013: 228). “Demi-autistic, genetically speaking; single-track tunnel-vision minds, a marked degree of social ineptitude” (Atwood 2013: 228).

After almost a year of not seeing each other Jimmy went to visit Crake at his university. Crake showed Jimmy around the campus and both the reader and Jimmy learned new things about Crake. He lived alone with everything from laundry to food being done for him, he alongside other students were part of various different projects. One of those projects was the “wolvog” project, a genetically spliced hybrid of a wolf and a dog. Crake described them to Jimmy as “They aren’t dogs, they just look like dogs. They’re wolvogs – they’re bred to deceive. Reach out to pat them, they’ll take your hand off” (Atwood 2013: 241). When Jimmy later talked about the dangers of those hybrids, Crake responded with a couple of interesting quotes: “Nature is to zoos as God is to churches” (Atwood 2013: 242) and added how he did not believe in God and “I don’t believe in Nature either. Or not with a capital N” (Atwood 2013: 242). This is supported by Glover’s article where she states: “Atwood highlights how easy it can become for scientists to believe that they can play God” (Glover 2009: 52). These couple of sentences raise the questions of ethics and morals as some of the authors of the critical articles authors have pointed out. This can be thought of as foreshadowing for future events to come. It is quite believable just from these quotes coupled with the fact that it was Crake’s second year at the university that he is the stereotypical scientist playing the Almighty. Crake does the things he likes without ever pondering about the consequences. He does not believe in rules, he ignores them at will. He does not care about ethics or others as

evidenced in Glover's article where she says how Crake's arrogant assumption to control the natural world shows the power of science in the novel (Glover 2009: 53). Even though Crake tells Jimmy in passing that a lot of his contemporaries are doing these projects for future wealth and profits, it can be believed that Crake himself is not really interested in any of that. He is not motivated by money, nor does he answer to anyone but himself and his ideology.

Moreover, it can be thought that even if his apocalypse plan did not start in his adolescence then it can be suggested that it started when he was isolated at university away from his only friend. There is evidence about that when Snowman later ponders about the visit to Crake's university. He remembers the first night when he had heard shouting and screaming. He remembers how Crake screamed in his sleep while he was dreaming and when he tried talking to Crake about it he answered that "I never dream" (Atwood 2013: 255). Atwood later says "So Crake never remembered his dreams. It's Snowman that remembers them instead. Worse than remembers: he's immersed in them, he'd wading through them, he's stuck in them. Every moment he's lived in the past few months was dreamed first by Crake. No wonder Crake screamed so much" (Atwood 2013: 256). This passage is clear evidence that at least by that point, his plan was already in motion.

### **2.2.3 Adult life**

After graduating from the university Crake went to work at "RejoovenEsense," which was one of the most powerful compounds and he was climbing the corporate ladder fast (Atwood 2013: 297). In some further communication between the two friends Crake told Jimmy that Uncle Pete had suddenly died from a virus and that sabotage was suspected but nothing had been proved (Atwood 2013: 297). This is Atwood's foreshadowing to the audience because when Jimmy asked Crake "Were you there?" (Atwood 2013: 297) Crake answered "In a manner of speaking (Atwood 2013: 297). This

is a clear indicator of Crake first trial-run. He had taken his apocalypse plan into phase one, testing the virus he would eventually perfect on a human. It can be wondered why he chose Uncle Pete as his first victim. Perhaps he was angry at his mother for remarrying him. It could have also been the fact that he was angry at the world, the world that had taken his biological father from him.

A few years later Crake re-entered Jimmy's life when he visited Jimmy at his apartment. By that point Crake had grown influential and it manifested in him asking Jimmy to go with him to the pleeblands and saying that he had passes to go which impressed Jimmy and made him think that Crake had become esteemed (Atwood 2013: 337). Moreover, because they went to the pleeblands Crake injected Jimmy with a "short-term vaccine" (Atwood 2013: 338) that was supposed to protect Jimmy from all the disease and filth in the pleeblands. Unbeknownst to Jimmy that was actually the immunity that Crake had created for his virus. Crake then asked Jimmy to come to work for his company as an advertiser for the "BlyssPluss Pill." According to Crake, the pill was designed to "eliminate the external causes of death" (Atwood 2013: 345). The three things that the pill does are prolonged youth, unlimited supply of libido and protection against all known sexually transmitted diseases (Atwood 2013: 346). In addition, there is a fourth effect that was not advertised, essentially it would act as a birth-control pill that would control the spread of population. Of course, later it is revealed that there was also a fifth effect. However, when discussing the Pill's functionality with Jimmy, Crake answered Jimmy's accusation of altruism by saying "It's not altruism exactly /.../ Demand for resources has exceeded supply for decades in marginal geopolitical areas, hence the famines and drought; but very soon, demand is going to exceed supply for everyone" (Atwood 2013: 347). Later Crake mentioned how the pill would be a success because "The tide of human desire, the desire for more and better, would overwhelm them" (Atwood

2013: 348).

In addition, Crake showed Jimmy his other creation, the Crakers. They were genetically engineered humans of all colours designed by Crake. “Programmed to drop dead at the age of thirty” (Atwood 2013: 356) is how Crake described them. In Glover’s critical article the author states how Atwood tries to show how Crake, in his own mind, is the “saviour of humanity” (Glover 2009: 54). The Crakers were vegetarians with no need to kill animals, they would survive just on leaves and grass. In addition, “hierarchy could not exist among them” (Atwood 2013: 358). Relationships were simple as well. “There would never be anything for these people to inherit, there would be no family trees, no marriages, and no divorces” (Atwood 2013: 359). Essentially Crake had constructed his perfect creation. In his own words, he had created immortality. However, this entire passage raises a few interesting points about Crake. When Jimmy asked of the monetary gains the pill could create, Crake told him that those are the main goals of his employers, but the reader can infer that money was not important to him.

As mentioned above, Crake had stated that he does not believe in God nor nature. He believes himself to be God. He creates and destroys just like God. It further proves his motivations, him being angry at the world and deciding that it should be he who decides the future. He fulfils the role of the mad scientist perfectly. Furthermore, he can be thought of as a fantastic villain because he does not destroy just for some ridiculous reason, he also creates something he believes in strongly.

## **2.3 Jimmy**

### **2.3.1 Childhood and formative years**

From one of the first passages in the novel the reader can see Jimmy’s compassion. When he was a child he was at a bonfire and was afraid of poison getting in the eyes of ducks which would hurt the animals (Atwood 2013: 17). In addition, someone said to him

that ducks “had no feelings” but he did not believe them (Atwood 2013: 17). This short passage is the first insight into the mind of Jimmy and the first indication of his kindness.

However, Jimmy’s childhood was not that different from Crake’s. His family life was complicated from an early age. Jimmy’s parents were constantly arguing. Sharon, Jimmy’s mother was extremely unhappy and that is what the reader learns when Snowman thinks back to his childhood: “Snowman has a clear image of his mother – of Jimmy’s mother – sitting at the kitchen table, still in her bathrobe when he came home from school for his lunch /.../ she would be looking out the window and smoking” (Atwood 2013: 35). Later on he remembers how “Jimmy had wanted to make her laugh – to make her happy, as he seemed to remember her being once” (Atwood 2013: 35). Here once again the reader can see how Jimmy is not a self-centred individual and values his mother’s feelings very highly. Furthermore, several years had passed and tensions at home were still high evidenced by the fact that Jimmy often imitated his parents’ arguments to other children at school: “Evil Dad” and “Righteous Mom” (Atwood 2013: 68) were the names Jimmy had given to his parents. Jimmy had a difficult time making real friends. He had only two real friends – Crake and a genetic splicing of a raccoon and a skunk, his pet rakunk, “Killer.” As evidenced by Jimmy’s introspection when he said to his pet: “Was that out of line, Killer?” (Atwood 2013: 69) the reader can see that even when trying to please his contemporaries at school, he still cared about his parents, mainly his mother.

However, the third greatest tragedy of Jimmy’s life comes in high school. After he had come home from school, he had found his mother’s note on the kitchen table informing him that she had left and that she had also taken his pet rakunk with her to “Liberate her, as I know she will be happier living a wild, free life in the forest” (Atwood 2013: 69). Jimmy’s mother had left to roam around free in the pleeblands because she had become disillusioned with life in the Compounds. This event is one of the most important



ones in Jimmy's life, as evidenced by the line "Jimmy had mourned for weeks. No, for months. Which one of them was he mourning the most? His mother, or an altered skunk?" (Atwood 2013: 70). This sets up his character brilliantly for everything that follows in the novel. The love he had felt for his mother was real and he felt that the love had not been reciprocated. In addition, he lost one of his closest friends and he had lost his preferred parent and was left with only one real friend, in Crake.

Moreover, after a little while his father started seeing his lab assistant Ramona, who tried to become a surrogate mother for Jimmy but made little progress. However, during one of the pornography watching sessions he had with Crake, he saw a young girl who he remained infatuated with throughout his life, called Oryx, which will be discussed in greater detail in subchapter 2.3.3. Furthermore, his friendship with Crake was the only real human connection he had, as evidenced by the events that transpired in his Father's wedding to Ramona. "At the wedding Jimmy got as drunk as it took" (Atwood 2013: 206) and it was Crake who took him back to his room and put him to bed in order to help him not cause any commotion at his father's wedding (Atwood 2013: 206). This, in addition to Crake helping Jimmy with his schoolwork, show the reader how the two boys, who were so different because one was a "numbers" person and the other was a "words" person, were somehow kindred spirits and were each other's only real friends. It could have been that all the love Jimmy had to give he gave to Crake and that is what ultimately made him decide to continue his friend's legacy in spite of everything Crake had done.

### **2.3.2 University**

After Jimmy had graduated from high school, he and Crake went separate ways to different universities and the contact with his only real friend gradually lessened. It can be said that Crake was Jimmy's main source of comfort throughout his formative years, especially after his mother left and took his only other friend with her. Jimmy was now,

truly, on his own. In addition to that, the university he went to was a low quality one and it did not provide him with the best prospects to establish himself. The major he chose was Problematics, “which was for word people” (Atwood 2013: 220). Jimmy understood that his future was not looking very bright. In addition, he was assigned a roommate, Bernice, who hated him from the beginning because of his “carnivorous ways” (Atwood 2013: 221). Moreover, she made a bonfire of Jimmy’s jockey shorts (Atwood 2013: 222).

Nevertheless, those complications did not stop Jimmy from making a string of romantic relationships throughout the university life. The women he sought out were all of a certain kind: “Semi-artistic, wise-wound kind in large supply at Martha Graham” (Atwood 2013: 222). The women saw how “fractured he was” (Atwood 2013: 223) in addition to him being their “creative project” (Atwood 2013: 223). But Jimmy never got close to any of them, telling them “I’m a lost cause” (Atwood 2013: 223) and “I’m emotionally dyslexic” (Atwood 2013: 223). However, after a short while all those relationships ended, because the women wanted more and Jimmy refused to change. His mother’s disappearance was well known to many as evidenced by the quote “They know about his scandalous mother, of course, these women. Ill winds blow far and find a ready welcome” (Atwood 2013: 224). That was one of the reasons why many women gravitated towards him. It can be thought that even if all of these relationships did not work out, Jimmy still had a goal. He had a big heart and wanted someone or something he could love and be responsible for. However, it can also be said that during these university years he was simply either too young or just not quite ready yet.

### **2.3.3 Adult life**

After graduating from the university, Jimmy moved in with a girl called Amanda Payne. She was not “very talkative” (Atwood 2013: 286) and “she was an image person, not a word person, she said: she claimed to think in pictures” (Atwood 2013: 286). In

addition, Jimmy also got a job at a company called AnooYoo. Jimmy's life started to have a semblance of positivity. However, that soon changed when Amanda left him because she disagreed with Jimmy's choice to go to work at that company. Things on the personal level were again, dire, as evidenced by the line: "His social life was – for the first time in many years – a zero" (Atwood 2013: 292). Nevertheless, his professional life was on the rise. He was promoted and so he could "buy new toys" (Atwood 2013: 294). Moreover, he started finding new women, but most of them were married (Atwood 2013: 294).

Shortly after that Jimmy saw Oryx again. He often watched television because of his loneliness and one night he saw a report about a "wave of adolescent girls found locked in garages" (Atwood 2013: 298). He recognized her look which conveyed "the same blend of innocence and contempt and understanding" (Atwood 2013: 300). For the first time in a long while he found someone he could give all his love to. Parallel to that, however, there was also the aftermath of his mother's escape. Year after year in high school, college and adult life Jimmy was subjected to questioning by the compounds' lawmen. They called it "little talks" (Atwood 2013: 301) and after five years after Jimmy starting his job at his company, they visited him again and showed him a live execution of his mother, in which the seconds before her death she uttered the words: "Goodbye. Remember Killer. I love you. Don't let me down" (Atwood 2013: 303). The aftermath of that video affected Jimmy greatly, as evidenced by the fact that "The next few weeks were the worst he could remember. Too many things were coming back to him, too much of what he'd lost, or – sadder – had never had in the first place" (Atwood 2013: 305). This event can be considered the second greatest tragedy in Jimmy's life and a special notice should be taken of his mother's last words "Don't let me down" (Atwood 2013: 303).

Moreover, after these tragic events Crake re-enters Jimmy's life and following their discourse, Jimmy is given a job to be an advertiser for Crake's newest creation, the

BlyssPluss pill. More importantly, he now has his only real friend back. It was there that Jimmy had spotted Oryx, the woman who was now the teacher of botany and zoology to the Crakers. As evidenced by the line “Gazing into those eyes, Jimmy had a moment of pure bliss, pure terror, because now she was no longer a picture – no longer merely an image, residing in secrecy” (Atwood 2013: 362). However, after a short dialogue with Crake, Jimmy realised that Crake was also in love with Oryx. Crake had remembered her just like Jimmy and had arranged for her to be brought to him first at his university and later hired at his place of business. Jimmy wanted desperately to be with her, because in his mind she was that woman and to his surprise, one night Oryx came to his room and seduced him (Atwood 2013: 367). Oryx entered into a loving relationship with Jimmy. However, she was also involved romantically with Crake, meanwhile being a marketer for the BlyssPluss pill in the pleeblands.

The relationship between Oryx and Jimmy was authentic. Jimmy wanted to know everything about her, but was also afraid of Crake finding out. Furthermore, this relationship eventually brings the reader to the greatest tragedy of Jimmy’s life. Oryx had previously asked him to promise her that: “If Crake isn’t here, if he goes away somewhere and I’m not here either, I want you to take care of the Crakers” (Atwood 2013: 378). Oryx later asks Jimmy to assure her as follows: “Say you’ll do it, don’t let me down. Promise?” (Atwood 2013: 378) All this prepares the reader for the climax of the novel. After the BlyssPluss pill reveals its fifth side-effect, Crake comes with Oryx to Jimmy at the Compound and slits her throat in front of Jimmy, resulting in Jimmy shooting him dead. However, just before that Crake tells Jimmy “I’m counting on you” (Atwood 2013: 385). It can be believed that this particular line that the three most important humans in Jimmy’s life all told him, is the main reason for him to continue Crake’s legacy and become the primary caretaker of the Crakers.

### 2.3.4 Snowman

As mentioned above, Atwood is a writer who loves to use various allusions to other texts in her novels. An extremely interesting parallel can be drawn with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Jimmy, who after the apocalypse has renamed himself Snowman, is the Horatio of this novel, as is argued by Shuli Barzilai in her critical article that was discussed in the literature review of the thesis. Indeed, Crake's father was murdered just like Hamlet's, his mother had a quick remarriage to a person he did not like and Crake, just like Hamlet, was driven to madness, albeit in this story the outcome was a tragedy on a grander scale.

Nevertheless, Snowman can be thought of as the Horatio. Importantly, he is also the witness that Crake leaves wandering after his death. Furthermore, Snowman being this story's equivalent of Horatio is evidenced by the fact that Crake reveals his plans to Jimmy in their younger years just as Hamlet explained all of his intentions to his friend. Eventually, Snowman is left to be the witness to Crake's story just as Horatio was. According to Barzilai (2008: 89), "In the final act, which is the narrative present of *Oryx and Crake*, the stage – and here all the world is a stage – is littered with countless corpses (there is no one left to count) and the curtain falls (but there is no one left to clap)." She then refers to a scene from the novel in which Snowman is out in the world wondering: "He scans the horizon, using his one sunglassed eye: nothing. /.../ Everything is so empty. Water, sand, sky, trees, fragments of past time. Nobody to hear him" (Atwood 2013: 12-13). Snowman is left to this world by Crake and he believes that he is the only human left and that Crake's virus had killed everyone. The only other intelligent beings are the Crakers.

As previously mentioned, he decides to take care of them in large part due to the promises he made to those closest in his previous life. However, it can be thought that there is another reason why he assumes the responsibility for the humanoids. Snowman

needs them as well. He requires some sort of sentient beings to not go completely insane in isolation. In doing so he assumes the parental role, as well as that of the teacher and protector and this is definitely in some part because of his difficult relationship with his own parents and that he does not want to repeat those mistakes. He recognizes his situation is different now, being in a world ravaged by climate disasters and patrolled by wolvoogs, the enraged animals once created by people like Crake. However, Snowman is still human and cannot survive on minimal resources like the genetically programmed Crakers, so he embarks on a quest back to the Compound, where he was when the apocalypse started. Going through the harsh wilderness and facing adversity at every turn, he returns to the Crakers with a clearer mind, completely in support of them.

Ultimately, the end of the novel provides the last high-point in the story of the protagonist. He is told by the Crakers that three people like Snowman had passed through as evidenced by the Crakers who said “Some others like you came here” (Atwood 2013: 422) and who add that “We went towards them to greet them, but they ran away” (Atwood 2013: 422). After hearing this, Snowman tracks them down to a fire and then has a monologue with himself about what to do. The novel closes on a cliffhanger ending with Snowman going to meet them, however the reader remains perplexed as to whether he has decided to murder them to protect the Crakers or tell them about everything that has happened. This final chapter of the novel is certainly open to interpretation as for what he did, but what is clear, is that after a long, difficult life that was filled with great sorrow, Snowman had created a role for himself even in that wretched post-apocalyptic world, and like Shakespeare’s Horatio, he had found a reason to continue living.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

The two research questions that this thesis sought to answer were Crake’s reasoning and Snowman’s perseverance. The main characters’ family lives were explored.

The friendship between the two men was examined as well. An interesting allegory to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was also explored in the context of this novel. The thesis statements of Crake's difficult life and anger as well as Jimmy's reasons for living on and making a commitment were explicated. It can be said that the character of Crake serves as a warning to the reader. A man of incredible intellect that in the novel takes matters into his own hands, completely ignores morals and ethics, and does what he thinks to be the right thing for the human race. He believes humans are greedy, wasteful and not worthy of the planet. Ultimately Crake engineers the apocalypse replacing humans with his own humanoid creation and achieving his goal of demented evolution. Through this character Atwood is trying to convey to the reader that it is important to be vigilant in the contemporary world. People should not live in constant paranoia, but should still keep be observant and cautious. Through the character of Snowman, Atwood tells the reader a story of an imperfect, yet kind-hearted and good man. Ultimately, he lives on after the apocalypse and through him the audience is offered a sense of hope and optimism. Against all odds, Snowman continues to persevere and show the reader that there is a light at the end of the tunnel even in dire circumstances. Atwood also tries to convey to the reader that the environment is important and humans need to take care of it before it is too late.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis explored the motivations of both main male characters and attempted to find the reasoning for their actions. The thesis showed how in the novel, STEM people are favoured over humanities individuals on the basis of Crake and Jimmy. Crake's exceptional mind allowed him to climb the ranks of society extremely rapidly and it helped him achieve his plan to end civilization with his drug, but also allowed his genetically engineered creatures to live on and roam the earth with his best friend, Jimmy. The issue of social class in the novel by contrasting the disease-infested pleeblands to the heavily guarded and safe compounds was also reviewed.

Furthermore, it can be said that the reasons for Crake's plan were all thoroughly discussed in the thesis. Every reason, from his awful family life and his mediocre social life to his ethics ignoring God complex were examined. Jimmy's decision to continue living in the post-apocalyptic wasteland was also explained. Through exploring Jimmy it was revealed that Crake, his mother and Oryx, the three most important people in his life, all told him that they were counting on him and they were hoping that he was not going to let them down.

In addition, the thesis discussed the genre of this book that the critics have debated. Atwood herself has called it "speculative fiction." That is something that does not contain any science fiction aspects but only talks about the things that have already been created. However, Mark S. J. Bosco has aptly described it as a dystopian novel with some post-apocalyptic elements.

Lastly, it is known that Atwood likes to use allegory in all her works. *Oryx and Crake* is no exception. Shuli Barzilai's theory offers the most interesting interpretation that Atwood's novel can be read as an allegory to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. She theorizes that Crake is Hamlet and Snowman becomes Horatio, the witness of the book who stays



alive in the end just as Horatio did in his story. Atwood's novel ends with the realization that all is not lost and that there is still hope.

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# RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

**Joosep Jussi**

**An Analysis of the Characters Crake and Jimmy/Snowman in Margaret Atwood's Dystopian Novel *Oryx and Crake***

**Ruiga ja Jimmy/Lumemehe tegelaskujude analüüs Margaret Atwoodi düstooopilises romaanis „Orüks ja Ruik”**

Bakalaureusetöö

2018

Lehekülgede arv: 35

Annotatsioon:

Töö eesmärk on leida põhjendid Margaret Atwoodi romaani „Orüks ja Ruik“ tegelaste Ruiga ja Jimmy/Lumemehe tegudele. Vastust otsitakse küsimustele, mis oli Ruiga motivatsioon hävitada tsivilisatsioon ning asendada inimesed oma geneetiliste „lastega” ja mis olid Jimmy, hiljem Lumemehe peamised põhjused postapokalüptilises maailmas edasi elada.

Väitekirja sissejuhatuses antakse lühike ülevaade teosest, Margaret Atwoodi loomingu peamisest temaatikast ning tuuakse välja töö eesmärgid.

Töö esimene peatükk on kirjandusülevaade, mis on üles ehitatud kriitikas kõige rohkem kajastatud kuuele teose aspektile. Nendeks on keskkonna, sotsiaalse klassi ja jätkusuutlikkuse temaatika romaanis, samuti Ruiga ja Jimmy/Lumemehe tegelaskujud ning Lumemehega seonduv huvitav „Hamleti“ allegooria. Viimane osa tegeleb palju debatitud žanri küsimusega.

Teine peatükk on töö empiiriline osa, mis analüüsib mõlema tegelase kujunemislugu lapsepõlvest kuni täiskasvanuea ja apokalüpsiseni, mille järel saab Jimmyst Lumemees, kes kannab hoolt Ruiga „laste“ eest.

Tööst selguvad Ruiga põhjused tsivilisatsiooni hävitamiseks ja tema jumala kompleks, samuti Jimmy valmisoleku tagamaad edasi elamiseks ning „laste“ eest hoole kandmiseks. Atwoodi raamatu sõnum on Lumemehe tegelaskuju kaudu näidata, et lootus ning optimism on alati olemas, isegi kõige mustemate stsenaariumite korral.

Märksõnad: Margaret Atwood, düstopia, keskkond, jätkusuutlikkus, sotsiaalne klass, allegooria

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